

Conservation Planning Q&A

(Oct. 3, 2005)

What is a Conservation plan?

Conservation plans under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) are modeled on recovery plans required under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (MMPA Sec 115(b)(2)). Conservation plans are prepared as soon as possible for stocks designated as depleted (MMPA Sec. 115(b)(1)(C)).

What are the required components of a conservation plan?

1. Objective measurable criteria, which when met, would result in the conservation and restoration of the stock to its optimum sustainable population (OSP);
2. A description of site specific management actions necessary for recovery; and
3. Estimates of time and cost to carry out the recommended recovery measures.

What is Optimum Sustainable Population (OSP)?

NOAA Fisheries Service regulations at 50 CFR 216.3 clarify the definition of OSP as a population size that falls within the range from the population level of a given species or stock, that is the largest supportable in the ecosystem (carrying capacity) to its maximum net productivity level. Maximum net productivity level is the abundance or population level that results in the greatest net annual increase in population numbers resulting from additions to the population from reproduction, less losses due to natural mortality.

What is the difference between a conservation plan and a recovery plan?

The two plans have similar requirements, however, the criteria under the two laws are slightly different. The goal of a conservation plan under the MMPA is the conservation and restoration of the stock to its OSP level. Recovery plans under the ESA are developed and implemented for the conservation and survival of endangered and threatened species.

Is the conservation plan related to the proposed listing of the Southern Resident killer whales under the ESA?

No. The conservation plan was developed because of the depleted status of the stock under the MMPA. The proposed listing is a separate process under the ESA. However, because the requirements for plans under the MMPA and ESA are similar, the conservation plan will form the basis of a recovery plan if the Southern Residents are listed under the ESA.

Does a conservation plan create new regulations?

A conservation plan is not a regulation. The plan may recommend regulatory actions and/or provide guidance for voluntary initiatives. Any new regulations would go through a public review process.

How has the public been involved in the conservation planning process?

Yes. NOAA Fisheries Service held a series of technical workshops and public meetings to gather input from the local community on conservation measures to address the factors

that may have caused the population's decline. We provided a preliminary draft conservation plan for public comment in March 2005. Comments on the proposed conservation plan are now being accepted until Jan. 3, 2006..